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C O N F I D E N T I A L TOKYO 001331

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SUBJECT: VIEWPOINT OF THE SOUTH KOREAN EMBASSY IN TOKYO

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES MICHAEL W. MICHALAK FOR REASONS 1.4 (b), (d).

1. (C) ROK Deputy Chief of Mission in Tokyo, Choo Kyu-ho, accompanied by First Secretary Jeong Woon-jin, conveyed his embassy's viewpoints on North Korea, China, and the status of Japan-ROK bilateral relations at a March 7, 2005 lunch with the Charge. DCM Choo presented a rather dismal assessment of the prospects for improving Japan-ROK relations in this "Year of Friendship" between the two countries. While 2005 marks the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and the ROK, DCM Choo pointed out that it is also the 100th anniversary of the Second Japan-Korea Agreement under which Korea became a protectorate of Japan. He also mentioned President Roh Moo-hyun's speech marking this year's anniversary of the March 1, 1919 Independence Movement in which Roh made an explicit comparison between the DPRK's abduction of Japanese citizens in the 1970s, and the forced relocation of Korean citizens by Japan during the period of annexation and occupation by Japan. DCM Choo went on to cite a bill recently submitted to the Shimane Prefectural Assembly in Japan that would designate a "Takeshima Island Day" in Japan (an island claimed by the ROK) and the upcoming April release of a new middle school history textbook in Japan as major further barriers in the relationship. He confirmed that as a result of these irritants, Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon had postponed his March 11, 2005 visit to Japan. DCM Choo said there was now even some doubt over an exchange of summit visits this year between Prime Minister Koizumi and President Roh. "It will now be a much tougher year in bilateral relations between the ROK and Japan," Choo said. He added that people-to-people interchange will continue to grow, but said he is now "very much concerned about the status of state-to-state relations."

Unhappy with Tokyo's Approach to FTA

2. (C) DCM Choo was highly critical of the Japanese government's current proposal for negotiating a Japan-ROK Free Trade Agreement. Prime Minister Koizumi and President Roh agreed last year that Japan and South Korea would conclude an FTA by the end of 2005, but DCM Choo said that negotiations have not even begun. He said that is because the Japanese government has proposed across-the-board tariff reductions of 50 percent or less. He said this would require only minor concessions by the Japanese, making it impossible for the ROK to sell such an FTA to the South Korean industrial sector. DCM Choo said METI Minister Nakagawa had recently asked to meet with ROK Trade Minister Kim Hyun-jong in an attempt to break the impasse, but that Kim had refused to meet with him until the Japanese government expresses some willingness to negotiate a "real FTA;" one that would significantly lower tariffs and expand trade.

DPRK, China, and the United States

3. (C) During his discussion with the Charge, DCM Choo also expressed his "personal views" regarding the security situation on the Korean peninsula. On the DPRK nuclear issue, DCM Choo said he believes Kim Jong-il is a contrarian by nature, and that even if a Six-Party negotiation is undertaken, "it will be very difficult to get to CVID." DCM Choo said that the eventual collapse of the DPRK will be impossible for South Korea to control. He called this the ROK's "agony." Finally, he said, although many view President Roh as being pro-Pyongyang, the truth is there have been no meaningful contacts between North and South Korea since former president Kim Dae-jung traveled to Pyongyang in June 2000. As a result, Choo said, "President Roh has grown very cool towards the North." DCM Choo predicted that "a certain level" of people-to-people exchange and economic activity will continue between North and South Korea, but said "no major breakthrough is likely."

4. (C) Finally, when asked about China's role on the peninsula, DCM Choo stated that there is a big gap in relations between Japan and China, and between Japan and the two Koreas, but also noted that a large gap has opened up between China and South Korea over the "Kingdom of Kogoryo" issue. For that reason, he said, "the ROK needs a moderate, benign power like the United States" to help assure its future.

